

MADISON RIVER SPECIAL RECREATION PERMIT PROGRAM

PURPOSE OF THE BRIEFING DOCUMENT:

To provide a status report on the Dillon Field Office's Madison River Special Recreation Permit (SRP) program in cooperation with Region 3 of the Montana Department of Fish, Wildlife and Parks (FWP).

ISSUES:

The Madison River is the most heavily fished river in the state. Approximately 150 outfitters report use on the Madison River. Currently, most of the commercial uses, competitive events, and organized group activities are unregulated and do not pay a fee for the use of public resources. The BLM and FWP manage nearly all the public land and recreation sites along the river, and each is responsible for managing commercial, competitive, and organized group activities.

Recognizing the benefits of cooperating on river management issues along the Madison, the BLM and FWP initiated the joint special recreation permit program. Implementation of the SRP program (spring of 2008) will require permittees to pay fees and accurately report use of public lands and related waters.

BACKGROUND:

The Madison River is near the community growth area of Bozeman, Mont. Commercial use is a significant component of the overall use of the river corridor, and represents a significant amount of the use of BLM and FWP sites. The SRP program will establish the means to regulate commercial use and group activities. The goal of the project is to obtain for the public a fair return for the commercial use of public resources. Side benefits are an improved ability to monitor and gather user information, and raise additional funds for maintaining recreation facilities and access roads. Permittees will be required to pay three percent of their annual gross revenue earned from the use of public land and related waters of the Madison River. The revenue from the SRP program will be used to administer the program, manage river recreation, and operate and maintain access sites along the river.

The BLM and FWP have received a grant from the River Fund for the first two years of the program and it is anticipated that the permit fee revenue will support the program in following years. The Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (REA, PL 108-447) was passed into law in December 2004 in the Omnibus Appropriations Bill. Section 6 (Cooperative Agreements) states that the secretary may enter into fee management agreements. The BLM and FWP have jointly conducted seven public meetings to provide information and obtain comments regarding this SRP program.

MAIN DECISION OR MESSAGE:

The BLM will provide for and receive fair value in recreation commercial activities as directed by REA, regulations and policy for all commercial activities, through the implementation of the SRP partnership. The overall strategy of the recreation fee program is to retain fee revenues to repair, improve, and maintain recreation sites and settings to quality standards, in order to maintain landscape settings, and to enhance the delivery of recreation services. The BLM will work in partnership with FWP to reduce duplication of administration procedures of permit and staffing operations for the public and governmental agencies. A successful, cooperative SRP program between BLM and FWP already exists on the Blackfoot River in western Montana. The Madison River project will continue this partnership. In the future, other river corridors may be evaluated for similar development/partnerships.

BUREAU PERSPECTIVE:

This partnership will streamline the administrative procedures for permittee applicants as well as the BLM and FWP. This cooperative agreement will benefit management of natural resources and improve recreation experiences.

Permittees support increased management of river uses; however, they are concerned about the cost and additional administrative burden imposed by permits. Some affected user groups are opposed to the SRP program and any regulation of use.

CONTACTS:

Christina Miller, recreation lead, (406) 896-5038; or Susan James, outdoor recreation planner, (406) 682-4082.